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LEGENDS AND LYRICS,

BY

ANNE ADELAIDE PROCTOR,

(DAUGHTER OF THE POET, BARRY CORNWALL.)

=====  
*One very neat volume.* 12mo.  
=====

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# TWO MILLIONS.

36876

BY

WILLIAM ALLEN BUTLER,

AUTHOR OF "NOTHING TO WEAR."

TWELFTH THOUSAND.

NEW YORK:  
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TO  
The Phi Beta Kappa Society  
OF YALE COLLEGE,  
THIS POEM,  
WRITTEN AT THEIR REQUEST,  
AND DELIVERED BEFORE THEM,  
JULY 28, 1858,  
IS DEDICATED.





*‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me, ‘look in thy heart  
and write!’*

So sang in other days that gentle Knight,

Gentlest and bravest, in undying song,

Like his own temper, sweet, serene, and strong.

*‘Look in thy heart and write!’* such was the word 5

In the wide woodlands, through the shadows, heard

By our own Household Bard, when on his ear

The Voices of the Night fell soft and clear.

And such the high behest which comes oftimes

To the true Poet of all years and climes, 10

The Master Minstrel, from whose golden thought  
 The perfect types of human song are wrought,  
 To whom all men give place, and meaner things  
 Sink into Sabbath stillness while he sings.

Not so my week-day Muse; to me she cries, 15  
 "Look through the world which all about you lies,  
 The noisy town, its common, daily life,  
 Flushed with coarse passions, hot with selfish strife,  
 The crowded street, the dens of Vice and Want,  
 The gilded halls where Pride and Fashion flaunt, 20  
 And from their mingled threads, the grave, the  
 gay,

Weave, if you will, the Epic of To-Day.

"Forego," she cries, "the boyish dream of Fame,  
 Speak as you see, careless of praise or blame.

Draw at a venture; it may be, the point 25  
 Of your chance shaft shall pierce a yielding joint  
 In the stout harness of some veteran wrong,  
 Or full armed folly, in its vantage strong.

Let but the word be honest and sincere,  
 For him alone whose inner sight is clear 30

From mist of passion or of selfish fear,  
The Truth, white-robed, shall, like a Vestal, wait  
Beside the shrine and sacred fires of Fate,  
Whose touch ethereal gives the eye to see  
Things as they are, not as they seem to be!" 35



## I.

FIRKIN was worth Two MILLIONS ; his Inventory,  
Of Real and Personal, told the pleasing story ;  
Two solid Millions, everybody said it,  
Was not his name a luminous orb of credit ?  
Was not his praise in every city Bank ? 5  
Was he not foremost in the foremost rank  
Of MERCHANT PRINCES, that invincible host,  
The Empire City's proud, imperial boast,  
Her veteran guard, whose brilliant cash advances,  
Not with fixed bayonets and bristling lances, 10  
But with sharp bargains and keen speculations,  
1\*

Carry her eagles to remotest nations ;  
 Bolder than ever Templars or Crusaders,  
 They sweep the distant seas, these daring Traders 15  
 Than fabled Argonauts, or classic Cæsars,  
 They grasp the World, these modern Golden  
 Fleecers !

Think not, in this last verse, my Muse evinces  
 The slightest disrespect to Merchant Princes ;  
 There are whose hearts are large and frank and 20  
 loyal,  
 Whose human nature, like their wealth, is royal ;  
 In whose free hands the glittering, dangerous dust  
 Is not mere money, but a sacred trust ;  
 Long may we keep their true, untainted line,  
 Such men are princes by a right divine. 25  
 Such was not Firkin ; in his principality,  
 Worse than high treason was all liberality,  
 No ray of bounty, with unselfish cheer,  
 Threw its bright beam across that dark frontier,  
 Where every friendly grace of heart or hand 30

Was seized and forfeited as contraband.  
 You read it in his eye, dull, dark, and stern,  
 Which clutched the light, but grudged a kind  
     return,

In genial glances, through the open day,  
 And with a shrewd suspicion turned away. 35

His hard, square features, like an iron safe,  
 Locked in his thoughts; no chance, unnoted waif  
 Of fugitive feeling, unawares betrayed  
 The inner man, or mental stock in trade.

The portly figure, with its solvent air, 40  
 Proclaimed to all the world the Millionnaire,

His purse and person both at fullest length,  
 And even the higher law which he obeyed,  
 With all his heart and soul and mind and strength,  
 To love his maker, for he was SELF-MADE!

Self-made, self-trained, self-willed, self-satisfied, 45

He was, himself, his daily boast and pride,  
 His wealth was all his own; had he not won it  
 With his own cunning skill? There shone upon it  
 No grateful memories of another's toil, 50



No flowers of friendship graced its sandy soil,  
 No ties ancestral linked it with the past,  
 As in his hard, close hands he held it fast.

I cannot trace the Firkin genealogy,  
 The Family Tree bore such a close analogy 55  
 To those rare Tropic plants which Nature shoots  
 Into mid-air without the aid of roots,  
 Whose swelling tumors, as they spread and mount,  
 Grow rank and flourish on their own account ;  
 Or the queer hints which scandal whispered  
     since 60  
 He grew to wealth, about our Merchant Prince,  
 Or make with fact what people said agree  
 Touching his origin and pedigree,  
 Or early efforts in the packing-line,  
 In which, like Venus, he had sprung from brine! 65  
 Wise is the child, they say, who knows his father,  
 A musty proverb, as he thought, for, rather,  
 Wiser for him if he could but ignore him,  
 And all the long, low line that went before him.

Now Firkin could not bear to be in debt 70  
 To anybody, even for existence,  
 And on the social ladder when he set  
 His foot, disdained an ancestor's assistance.  
 Not their dry bones, but his successful chase  
 Of solid fortune, was his ground of title, 75  
 He was the net proceeds of all his race,  
 And his Two Millions were his just requital,  
 For we must gauge the worth of human adults,  
 As of mess pork, by total cash results.  
 Therefore it quite confounded and incensed him, 80  
 To think the world should point a sneer against  
     him  
 Upon the score of birth or lineage ;  
 It was unjust to linger on the page,  
 And, in the Ledgers of old family pride,  
 Reckon the items on the debit side ; 85  
 Time's rapid finger should the line descend  
 And foot the credit at the final end.  
 So, as to all the space 'twixt Noah's ark  
 And his own life, the prudent Muse keeps dark,

The interval perfumed by that aroma, 90  
 Which wraps with mystery the birth of Homer,  
 Or breathes through History when she describes  
 Those trackless fugitives, the lost Ten Tribes!

He had a coat of arms, a very grand one,  
 Bran-new besides, and not a second-hand one; 95  
 A coat of many colors and devices,  
 One of the kind which bring the highest prices,  
 Bought at a Heraldry slop-shop, where they take  
 One's measure for such coats of every make,  
 And give the pick of all the crests and quarterings 100  
 Of ancient Barons, famous for their slaughterings,  
 And modern Dukes, famous—for nothing at all,  
 With points and bars and bearings, great and small,  
 Lions and unicorns, and beasts with wings,  
 And all the sinister bends of all the Kings. 105  
 To pay his way, he thought, he scarce could miss,  
 Into the best Society, with this  
 Depreciated scrip of sham gentility;  
 And, really, the artist showed a great facility

In cleverly managing to put as much on, 110  
As could be crowded upon one escutcheon ;  
Instead of flaming shield, with fancy pattern,  
And golden gules, bright as the rings of Saturn,  
He chose a Silver Dollar, freshly minted,  
And with bold touches and designs unstinted, 115  
Traced with all manner of mystical freemasonry,  
Made it a rampant, stylish bit of blazonry.  
It was a sort of circular allegory  
Of the Two Millions and their owner's glory.  
This suited Firkin better than progenitors, 120  
In longest line of Presidents or Senators ;  
He had it painted on his carriage doors,  
Stamped on his spoons, and inlaid in his floors ;  
It shone, resplendent, on each piece of china ;  
No work of art, he fancied, could be finer, 125  
When he beheld its lines, so bright and wavy,  
Gleam in the soup and glimmer through the gravy !  
Pleased as a child with every separate view,  
Or a New Zealander with a fresh tattoo !

His Creed was simple as a Creed could be, 130  
Firkin believed in things that he could see ;  
Things that were palpable to sight and touch,  
That he could measure by the test 'how much,'  
And grasp securely in his mental clutch.  
He had a lively faith in the Five Senses, 135  
They never cheated him with false pretences,  
Nor put him off to doubtful evidences ;  
These and his mother wit were all his light—  
What could be safer than to walk by sight ?  
"He had been young, and now was old," he said, 140  
"But never had he seen the self-made man  
Forsaken, nor his children begging bread,  
Provided they pursued their father's plan,  
All through their lives, as he himself had done,  
And kept a sharp lookout for Number One !" 145  
A golden rule, Firkin had early learned,  
And every hour to good advantage turned ;  
This, and such precious maxims as abounded  
In that pure word of riches, wisdom, health,  
According to Poor Richard, as expounded 150

By Doctor Franklin, in his *Way to Wealth*,  
 Served him for law and gospel and tradition,  
 And he himself their luminous exposition.  
 These were the fiscal lights, in whose clear ray  
 He could divide the Universe, straightway, 155  
 Into the things that would and wouldn't pay.  
 By these he steered through all the straits of trade,  
 Where something must be risked, or nothing made;  
 These oft through Wall street, with its reefs and  
     rocks,  
 And phantom ventures, launched from fancy stocks, 160  
 Had brought him safe from many a hazard rash,  
 His compass—caution, and his pole-star—cash.  
 And now, grown rich, these guided him, at will,  
 In the green pastures, by the waters still,  
 Of safe investment, whether in real estate, 165  
 At points not likely to depreciate,  
 Or bond and mortgage, or, his greater favorite,  
 Because it had a spice of risk to flavor it,  
 The quiet purchase, at the market rate,  
 Of first class paper, such as brokers bait 170

Their largest hooks with, when they lie in wait,  
With every tempting minnow, fly and snare,  
For that shy fish, the speckled Millionaire  
Who loves the shade, but, if that way it floats,  
Likes a sly nibble at a batch of notes; 175  
Firkin, shrewd fellow, with his sharpened sight,  
Knew when precisely, and when not, to bite ;  
Lay in the dark, with his usurious eye,  
Until some choice endorser happened by,  
Or plump acceptor, and then took the fly. 180  
At this nice sport, so fatal to so many,  
It was his boast, he never lost a penny,  
And the old boy, the brokers would repeat,  
Was quite the keenest shaver in the street.  
Thus active practice kept his faith alive, 185  
Faith in himself and in the senses five,  
The almighty Dollar, and its powers incessant,  
In ready money and a paying Present ;  
However fair, he trusted no futurity  
Which could not give collateral security. 190  
Some men, he knew, believed, at least professed,

Faith in hereafters, which they dimly guessed ;  
The substance, he preferred, of things possessed !

And yet, he seemed devout ; without much search,  
You might have found, on any Sunday morning,  
His visible coach, outside the visible church,  
With green and gold its sacred front adorning.

195

A gorgeous coachman, somewhat flushed with  
sherry,

A footman, portly with perpetual dinners,

Waited, while Firkin in the sanctuary,

200

With many other 'miserable sinners,'

Cushioned the carnal man in drowsy pews,

Dozed over gilt-edged rubric, prayer and psal-  
ter,

Rose with the music, looked with liberal views,

On prima donnas, never known to falter,

205

In chant or solo, hymn, or anthem splendid,

And still enchanting when the chant was ended ;

Then sat or knelt, grave as the altar bronzes,

And went through all the usual responses.



Those solemn prayers, those litanies sublime, 210  
 The ancient Church first taught the lips of Time,  
 Thenceforth to sound forever—as when first,  
 Flooded with light, the lips of Memnon burst  
 From their cold stillness, and rejoicing, gave,  
 Back to the flood of Day, its tide upborne 215  
 Of rarest harmony, wave answering wave,  
 Deep calling unto deep, Music to Morn !  
 Those lofty chants, first echoed under domes  
 Of starry midnight, or in catacombs  
 Where, by rude altars and sepulchral tombs, 220  
 Deep in the rocky earth, the vestal choirs  
 Rehearsed their music for the martyr fires ;  
 Now swelled from lips of people or of priest,  
 To fall on Firkin's ear without the least  
 Responsive utterance, or the faintest notion 225  
 That they had any reference to devotion.  
 He liked the service, but, I grieve to state,  
 If it had been instead a service of plate,  
 He could have given a better estimate  
 Of its real value, for in truth our hero, 230

As to religious feeling stood at zero.  
And had it chanced the universal Church,  
In solid phalanx, without break or schism,  
Had, on a sudden, taken a backward lurch,  
Two thousand years or more, to Judaism, *235*  
Or from the Christian plunged into the Pagan,  
And on its altars set up Jove or Dagon,  
Firkin would still have worshipped with the crowd,  
And at the newest shrine devoutly bowed,  
Still offered up his weekly stint of praise, *240*  
In heathen darkness or the gospel's blaze,  
With incense, or burnt offerings, or libations,  
Alike unconscious of the innovations,  
Save that he might, perhaps, in Wall street phrase,  
Have noticed a slight change in the quotations! *245*  
Noticed, but heeded not, he could not give  
His time to liturgies, nor even live  
In all things like a good conservative,  
Of the true modern stamp, whose orthodoxy  
Does good through agents and serves God by proxy! *250*  
His view was this—religion he regarded

An institution not to be discarded,  
 Of no great use in Time, yet who shall say  
 But some new sphere may bring it into play?  
 Therefore he gave it half a day in seven, 255  
 'Twas well to keep on speaking terms with Heaven.  
 Let the priests wrangle, in their long debates,  
 Of doctrines, dogmas, destinies and dates,  
 He cared for none of these—nothing to him  
 Their dull disputes and superstitions dim, 260  
 They neither charmed his sense nor could they  
     shock it,  
 They never put a dollar in his pocket;  
 (And very rarely took a dollar out,  
 As all the Charities can vouch, no doubt;)  
 He never cared to vex himself about them, 265  
 He got along so very well without them;  
 From Genesis straight on to Revelations,  
 He could dispense with all the Dispensations!

You may imagine that the philanthropic  
 Was not with him a very favorite topic; 270

One test he meted to the Sons of Time,  
Success was virtue, Poverty was crime.  
He who had failed in Life's scrub race to win,  
Was justly punished for his mortal sin,  
That deadliest style of human misbehaving, *275*  
The leaving undone of getting and of saving;  
Wealth was man's normal state, its loss because  
The losers violated Nature's laws,  
And chose to live their vicious, penniless lives,  
In spite of ants and beavers and bee-hives, *280*  
And other bright examples, by all which  
She showed them clearly how they might grow rich.  
Therefore, it was as plain as Trinity steeple,  
That every scheme for aiding indigent people  
Was with the worst of vices a connivance; *285*  
He turned with horror from the base contrivance.  
This was his only theory to repress  
The social evils, and their wrongs redress,  
Save that in current cases of distress,  
From paupers, as from pestilence, he shrank, *290*  
Upon the virtuous notion that "they drank!"

The newest way to christianize barbarity,  
And whip in Temperance as a foe to Charity!

His politics took on the Neutral tints,  
A safe complexion for a Merchant Prince, 295  
Who valued Government for its protection  
To wealth and capital against insurrection.  
He thought that legislation should be planned,  
And the great Ship of State equipped and manned,  
Solely with reference to the property owners, 300  
Those cabin passengers, our American Peerage,  
While you and I, and other luckless Jonahs,  
Who work the ship, or suffer in the steerage,  
He reckoned dangerous chaps who raised the gales  
Which roared and rattled through the spars and  
sails. 305

As for the rest, his hate was warm and hearty,  
Against all politicians and each party.  
No club or council held him in communion ;  
No doubtful canvass lured him into bets ;  
He never even helped to save the Union, 310

Or to pay off our greatest Statesman's debts ;  
 Those fields of Golden Cloth, on which, 'tis said,  
 The Wall-street heroes very often bled !

Firkin was childless. In his earlier life,  
 He had possessed that useful thing, a wife, 315  
 But failing to keep pace with his swift stride,  
 In the hot dash at fortune, by his side,  
 Long since she faltered, faded, drooped, and died.  
 He kept his vow to cherish and to love her,  
 By building a great granite tomb above her, 320  
 Which to the world his wedded virtues told,  
 Just like them too, stiff, hollow, and stone cold !  
 She never knew a mother's tender duty,  
 Or else, perchance, its pure, fresh warmth and  
     beauty  
 Her wasted heart with a new glow had fired, 325  
 And with a sacred strength her life inspired ;  
 But, in her worse than widowhood, exiled,  
 Had taken to her heart an orphan child,  
 A daughter by adoption, upon whom,  
 After his spouse lay shrined within her tomb, 330

Firkin himself complacently had glanced,  
And, step by step, had cautiously advanced,  
Until she ruled his household ; for his keen,  
Sagacious foresight, in the girl, had seen  
A quick, bright spirit, fitted for command, 335  
And, for his own convenience, he had planned  
That he would be her guardian and protector,  
Till he could marry her to some Bank Director.

She was a fair New England maiden, born,  
Not where broad fields of yellow wheat and corn, 340  
Through sunlit valleys, wave and gaily tinge  
The quiet homesteads with their golden fringe,  
While Nature blends their warm and genial flush  
In girlhood's budding glow and virgin blush ;  
Nor on the hill-sides of the distant North, 345  
Where, from the unfenced forests gushing forth,  
O'er rocky beds, sweep the swift mountain streams,  
Whose sparkling torrent, as it leaps and gleams,  
Is kindred to the keener flash that beams  
From laughing eyes on pure unsullied faces, 350  
While, like the Naiads, crowned with fabled graces,

They haunt and gladden those dark Maple shades,  
Our fairer wood-nymphs, the Green Mountain  
    maids!

But on the Eastern shore, where the waves break  
On rocky headlands, and the night winds wake      355  
The mournful echoes of the forest pines,  
Which stretch along the coast their dreary lines;  
And the sea-breezes, as they come and go,  
On beauty's cheek have left a deeper glow,  
And the eye kindles like some far off ship,      360  
Struck with a sudden sunbeam, and the lip  
Wears the sad smile of those whose calmer moods  
Are nursed by Ocean sands and solitudes!

Such was this RACHEL; and her nature kept  
Part of its early grace and seaside health,      365  
In the spoiled city; in her soul it slept  
And woke, sometimes half conscious, half by stealth,  
In sudden pauses, its calm undertone  
Heard by no other ear, scarce by her own,  
Nerving the virtue which did not forsake her,      370



But kept its native beauty, fresh and green,  
 In spite of STEWART'S and a French dressmaker,  
 And not put on and off, like crinoline—  
 Virtue, which drew its light and strength and  
     love,

And sense of beauty, from a source above 375  
 The level of the mirror, or the date  
 Of the last mode, or newest fashion plate.

Firkin himself was puzzled to understand  
 If he or she had got the upper hand,  
 In the incessant skirmish and sword-play 380  
 Their spirits waged together for the sway  
 Over each other's will ; for in the sphere,  
 Where woman's sense and wit are strong and  
     clear,

In the wide circuit of the heart's dominions,  
 She had, and claimed, and kept, her own opinions, 385  
 Till he began to hate her, and, one day,  
 When she had given her heart and hand away,  
 Against his oft repeated, stern denial,  
 And brought his feeling to the final trial,

He threw her off, as lightly as the flower 390  
 Which in his button-hole had bloomed an hour,  
 Placed by her hand, perhaps, on some May morn-  
 ing ;

The blow was struck without a moment's warning,  
 No present pity ; for the past no thanks ;  
 And quite forgetting all that bland urbanity, 395  
 Which so distinguished him in down-town Banks,  
 With its descent he mingled such profanity,  
 As suited rather, so my Muse just hints,  
 A Prince of Darkness, than a Merchant Prince !

He banished her, and then, in purest spite, 400  
 And to shut out forgiveness, the same night,  
 Wrote to his native town for half a score  
 Of distant relatives to fill her place ;  
 They came, post haste, the invited ones and more,  
 A sudden invasion of the Firkin race, 405  
 Thrifty and sly to watch and lie in wait,  
 And peep and pry around his great estate.  
 To lay their plans and stratagems and traps,

And nurse, with hope, each vagrant, chance “per  
haps” !

They felt his pulse when he was sound asleep, 410  
 Wondered how long the vital spark would keep,  
 And calculated by the Insurance Tables,  
 Those cunningly devised financial fables,  
 With long divisions, addings, and subtraction,  
 The value of his life, down to a fraction. 415  
 This sort of ante-mortem examination  
 Would have annoyed its subject, without doubt,  
 If ever by word, or act, or penetration,  
 Sooner or later, he had found them out ;  
 But he dreamed not a soul within his portal 420  
 Harbored the thought that he was not immortal,  
 At least if so he pleased ; with equal sense  
 They might have doubted his omnipotence !

Rachel was married, and, to tell the truth,  
 It was a foolish match, for Love and Youth, 425  
 In forming their copartnerships are rash,  
 Unless they have that special partner, Cash !

Love brought her grace and beauty as her dower,  
And Youth his lofty hopes and dreams of power,  
But on the wedding-day, ere that rapt hour 430  
Of plighted vows, had grown a moment older,  
The Husband tapped the Lover on the shoulder,  
Like a Detective, with the frowning threat  
Of present want of means and future debt.  
For though his aims were high, and pure and 435  
sunny,  
He had no faculty for making money,  
That pocket compass by which Dulness steers  
Its steady course to wealth through all the years,  
While Genius, gazing at the stars, is tost  
On trackless billows, founders, and is lost. 440  
We sometimes ask, why is it, Nature pours  
Into such leaden caskets such rich stores,  
And in our wisdom blame and criticise her ;  
We may be wise, but Nature is much wiser,  
She, in the coarser, heavier, baser mould 445  
Of human character, runs her molten gold,  
While higher spirits for herself she chooses,  
And shapes and fashions to her finer uses !

But Rachel's husband, for his purse, alas!  
 Was one of that fine, brilliant, useless class, 450  
 The men of genius; in some luckier sphere,  
 Where every body should possess a clear,  
 Net income of, at least, ten thousand a year,  
 He might have been an ornament to society;  
 He was resplendent with that rare variety 455  
 Of tastes and faculties and mental gifts,  
 Which, like the rapid eagle pinion, lifts  
 The soul sublimely through the empyrean,  
 Where choirs of beauty chant their loftiest pæan;  
 But on descending, hungry, from those upper 460  
 Regions of song, goes starving for a supper.  
 He was a master of the theoretical,  
 The high-ideal, and the pure æsthetical,  
 The imaginary, mystic, and didactical,  
 In short, of every thing, except the practical. 465  
 His aims were glorious and his thoughts intense,  
 He wanted nothing, except common sense;  
 Could plan new worlds without the least mis-  
     giving,  
 But in this planet couldn't make a living.

The splendid purposes and lofty schemes, 470  
 In which he wasted life with golden dreams,  
 Might, in Utopia, have made him Lord  
 Of the ascendant, but they paid no board,  
 Washing, or lodging in the Fifteenth Ward.  
 He tried the various callings and professions 475  
 By which men get their honors and possessions,  
 But all their substance his weak grasp eluded,  
 And still he stood, despondent and deluded,  
 Upon the brink of Fortune, while her tide  
 Ebb'd fast away, as there, in aimless pride, 480  
 He lingered, musing, to his doubts a slave ;  
 While others boldy dashed into the wave,  
 Dived through the breakers with their frantic  
     whirl,  
 And through the rocks and quicksands grasped the  
     pearl.

He might have saved a moderate patrimony, 485  
 (Sufficient even after matrimony,)

But, like all men of vivid imagination,  
 He had a lingering love of speculation ;

2\*

A fancy for those airy, brilliant bubbles,  
 By which the wealth of Wall Street daily doubles 490  
 A fatal fondness for those works of art,  
 Which, by the thousand, into being start,  
 With their fine lines and delicate vignettes,  
 Putting the very best face upon the debts  
 Of Corporate bodies, who, as we all know, 495  
 Thrive for the most part upon what they owe!  
 There was no scheme, however visionary,  
 In which he could not be induced to bury  
 A little money and much expectation;  
 If there had been a Building Association 500  
 For putting up and selling Chateaux in Spain,  
 He had subscribed at once; and when, in vain,  
 Subscription on subscription had been heaped,  
 Share after share of stock, and nothing reaped,  
 He chanced one morning in the *Times* to see 505  
 The circular of the GOLD SWAMP COMPANY,  
 Of which the money articles all said,  
 It was a certain project; for its head  
 Was Firkin, foremost among Millionnaires,  
 Who had just taken twenty thousand shares; 510

“Here,” cried our unsuccessful friend, “at least,  
 Success is sure as daylight in the east,  
 Free from all chances, doubts, or cruel risks;  
 There must be golden harvests, and the disks,  
 Innumerable, of dollars, on the horizon *515*  
 Of any scheme Firkin has fixed his eyes on!”

So he bought in, invested all he had,  
 And as the shares soon trebled and quadrupled,  
 With the hot fever of success run mad,  
 He lost his mental equipoise, nor scrupled *520*  
 To borrow where he could, and still to buy,  
 For fact was fact, and figures could not lie.

Two months the bubble glittered, then, one morn-  
 ing,  
 Grew pale, and burst, without a moment’s warn-  
 ing.

A grand catastrophe! The great Gold Swamp, *525*  
 Inaugurated with such pride and pomp,  
 Only six weeks before, by an Excursion,  
 Of which we all perused the pleasing version,  
 In all the papers; graced by two ex-Presidents,  
 And all the city’s most distinguished residents; *530*



A splendid dinner, at which General Diddle  
 Headed the board, (a model in the middle,  
 Of the Gold Swamp and neighboring morasses,  
 Splendidly done in sugar and molasses),  
 Supported by a score of Peter Funks, 535  
 Of the mock Mining stamp, who deal in chunks  
 Of confidence ores and metals, as examples,  
 And sell the bowels of the earth by samples !  
 A brilliant festival, and when, quite late,  
 The Engineer, Twobottles, rose to state, 540  
 The Swamp was yielding at the fabulous rate  
 Of Fifty Millions monthly, the whole table  
 With cheers and tigers was a perfect Babel.  
 The Swamp, I say, though dressed in such bright  
     raiment  
 Of hope and promise, failed, suspended payment, 550  
 Gave up its golden issues, and the news,  
 Which served a day the city to amuse,  
 Was soon abroad, that never, for one minute,  
 Had it contained a pennyweight of gold,  
 Save what had slyly been deposited in it, 555  
 By a smart brace of brokers, keen and bold,

For a new Fancy, and some plump amounts  
 With which to fatten their slim Bank accounts.  
 Firkin, the rumor also got about,  
 With his unerring prudence, had sold out, *560*  
 The day of the Excursion, when the shares  
 Touched at the highest figure; and the affairs  
 Taking soon after a dubious situation,  
 He, with a burst of virtuous indignation,  
 Resigned at once the Presidential station! *565*

This was the final blow. The poor stockholder,  
 Stunned by the crash, which even on a bolder,  
 Less sensitive nature, had fallen with crushing  
 weight,  
 Struggled no longer with his adverse fate.  
 Two years of light and shade had quickly flown, *570*  
 Since he and Rachel stood within the zone  
 Of wedded life, and, although overcast  
 By frowning fortunes, still, through all their Past,  
 Such golden memories flashed, as when the heat,  
 Sometimes in Summer, in its fervid throe *575*

Behind the heavy clouds, will throb and beat,  
And flood the darkness with its tender glow.  
But now the present sorrow wore no face  
Of hope or pity ; from his own disgrace  
He shrank, with shattered reason ; with the wild 530  
And desperate agony, struggling, for a space,  
Cast frenzied glances on his wife and child,  
Then sank in sad oblivion of will,  
And thought and sense and sight and being, until  
Gently and calmly, on an Autumn day, 540  
He lost his hold on life and passed away.

## II.

WHERE should she go? How, from the solid  
spheres,

Hew out the fortune he had failed to carve?

A timid woman, trembling and in tears,

The world was all before her—where to starve!

The world, which never yet, with all its wit,

In any clever moment chanced to hit,

In its Malthusian theories of Man,

Or other muddy shoals quack sages swim in,

With social splashings, upon any plan

For getting rid of these unfortunate women!

10

Still, still they haunt us, at all times and places,  
With their gaunt shapes and pale, imploring faces,  
Still, still they plead by every tenderest tie,  
For help and pity as we pass them by,  
Or dole the pittance which we give and grudge, 15  
Or thrust them back, with merciless hands, to  
drudge  
In the scant spaces where we hem them in,  
With metes and bounds of sex and caste, and then  
Brand their impatience as a shame and sin,  
And wicked trespass on the rights of men ; 20  
Mock their loud prayers with needles, thread, and  
shears,  
And when they cry to Heaven, stop our ears ;  
In our cold wisdom harsher than the Turk,  
He shuts them up for pleasure, we for work !

Thus in her widowhood, a prisoner, 25  
In all the earth there was no place for her.  
She was a lady once ; there was the rub ;  
She had no heart to beg, no strength to scrub,  
Or earn days' wages at the washing-tub ;

And when she looked, as many a sorrowing sister, 30  
Before and since, down that attractive Vista  
Which opened to her sight with joys o'erflowing,  
That charming view, a lifetime of plain sewing ;  
She found that all its fascinating scenery  
Was quite cut up and ruined by machinery ! 35  
Just as the rapid rattle on the rail  
Destroys the calm of some secluded vale.  
She saw the new Invention's tiny shaft,  
As in its nimble task it plied and ticked,  
It seemed as if the wicked minion laughed 40  
At the slow thimble, and the fingers pricked  
With weary stitches, and cried out in glee,  
Give up the race, you can't compete with me,  
The seamstress sinks before the Patentee !

She looked for help to her own sex, to those 45  
Strong-minded women who have come to blows  
With all mankind, and publish their intentions  
In fierce debates and furious Conventions ;  
To one of these she went and sat and wondered,  
As the Olympian Junos stormed and thundered, 50

It was exciting, but the heated place  
 Threw not a ray of light upon her case.  
 She did not long to cut the social throat,  
 She did not want two husbands or one vote,  
 Or to discard her gentle, womanly nature, 55  
 For any seat in any Legislature.  
 If she had owned an acre, on its axis,  
 While the world turned, she would have paid her  
     taxes,  
 With or without a representative,  
 For what she wanted was a chance to live, 60  
 A seat at Nature's table, and a share  
 In human sympathy and love and care.  
 Poor child! she found the march of Women's  
     Rights  
 Is not for her who suffers, but who fights,  
 And the prime maxim, in its foremost van, 65  
 Not Love to Woman but Revenge on Man!

At last, when Hunger snapped the thread of  
     Pride,  
 She went to Firkin; in the world beside,

She had no other hope, nor was this hope,  
But the last glimmering ray by which to grope 70  
Along the way which led, she knew not where,  
Through the untrodden midnight of despair.  
She sought him at his house, that lofty pile,  
Built on the Avenue, in the latest style  
Of Merchant Princes, grand, grotesque and florid, 75  
Out of the finest freestone ever quarried.  
In its erection, as he oft declared  
To wondering visitors, no expense was spared,  
And had he said, no order of architecture,  
'Twould have been truer still, as I conjecture. 80  
The builders, with their taste so fine and funny,  
Laid themselves out, as well as Firkin's money,  
And in a way that beggars all description,  
Blended Corinthian, Gothic and Egyptian,  
And other famous styles with classic rarities, 85  
In one grand jumble of brown stone vulgarities.  
'Twas bad enough outside, but once within,  
It was like probing deeper than the skin,  
Some mammoth fester, such its tainted mixtures  
Of decorations, furniture and fixtures. 90



It seemed as if a bomb-shell, charged and loaded  
 With paint, and gilt, and plaster, had exploded,  
 Without regard to anybody's feelings,  
 On walls and columns, cornices, and ceilings.  
 The ambitious plasterers had eclipsed the builders, *95*  
 And in their turn were outdone by the gilders ;  
 The painters then—beside whose rich adorning,  
 The brightest rainbow would have seemed deep  
     mourning ;  
 From lowest basement up to topmost attic,  
 The whole was gorgeous, glaring and prismatic ; *100*  
 Pannelled and kalsomined, and striped, and starred,  
 Paint by the bucket, frescoes by the yard,  
 Laid on in thickest layers by battalions  
 Of exiled red Republican Italians !  
 With pots and brushes, blues and greens and yel-  
     lows, *105*  
 They scaled the walls, the bold, designing fellows,  
 And took the house by storm with their mythol-  
     ogy,  
 Fruits, flowers, flamingoes, landscapes, and zool-  
     ogy,

Mermaids and Fauns, Arcadian shepherdesses,  
Long in the ringlets, scanty in the dresses, 110  
Heroes and gods and goddesses and ogres,  
Nymphs in pink tunics, sages in red togas,  
Heads of Old Masters, shaded somewhat duller,  
And full length Venuses, all in flesh color !  
Then following up the grand Two Million plan, 115  
Where paint left off, upholstery began ;  
The latest artist at fresh marvels aims,  
Acres of mirrors in prodigious frames,  
And miles of damask, spread in rich expansion  
Of gilt and crimson, through the costly mansion ; 120  
Incredible carpets, which outstared the ceiling,  
With flaming hues that set the brain to reeling,  
And with the walls in one fierce blaze united—  
O what a sight, when all the gas was lighted,  
And Firkin, seated with some fellow snob, 125  
Surveyed the scene beneath the brilliant streamers,  
Declared the parlors were “ a splendid job,  
Which went ahead of all the Collins steamers ;  
Taylor’s saloon, when every jet is on ;  
Or the new Capitol at Washington ! ” 130

And echoed back the truthful observation,  
 ‘There’s nothing like it in the whole creation!’”

Here our poor widow sought the Millionnaire,  
 But little knew with what inveterate care,  
 His doors were bolted against all descriptions *135*  
 Of paupers, agents, circulars and subscriptions.  
 Her poverty-stricken air at once detected,  
 By the smart footman, she was first inspected,  
 With his sharp scrutiny, like a thing infected ;  
 And, lest the plague should any further go, *140*  
 He quarantined her in the portico.  
 And, as there was no process of fumigation  
 By which to disinfect a poor relation,  
 Or long-discarded pensioner on probation,  
 Firkin gave orders she should be suppressed ; *145*  
 He sent a dollar, with the kind request  
 She would not call again, and the suggestion,  
 That it appeared to him beyond all question  
 She should proceed immediately out West !  
 She took the money, wished it had been more, *150*  
 For her child’s sake, then turned and left the door ;

Upon the marble threshold, from her feet,  
Shook off the dust, then shrank to her retreat,  
A distant garret, where her sorrows and prayers  
Climbed, with her aching feet, those weary stairs!     /s/

### III.

It was a Summer's day in Winter, one  
Of those rare noontides, when the distant Sun,  
Sees the fair Earth, all dressed in virginal snow,  
And woos her beauty with a warmer glow.  
Firkin bethought him that he owned a row 5  
Of Tenement Houses, taken for a debt,  
From which his tardy Agent failed to get  
The total monthly score of rent betimes ;  
"I'll go," he thought, "and visit him for his crimes,  
Reduce his wages and increase the rent ; 10  
The investment only yields me ten per cent.,

And with such property one's only chance,  
Is prompt collection, always in advance!"

The TENEMENT HOUSE, o'er which no friendly  
movement  
Has waved the Enchanter's wand of "Modern Im- 15  
provement,"  
With half cracked walls and windows all askew,  
Stamped with the blight of beggary through and  
through,  
Lintel and door-post sprinkled with its sign,  
House after house, extends the dismal line;  
A dreary sight to philanthropic eyes, 20  
Between the gutter and the distant skies,  
By filth and noisome odors marked and tracked,  
Through the dense districts where the poor are  
packed,  
Crowded and swarming in those wretched hives,  
Layer on layer of cheap human lives! 25  
Or, if you think the picture overdrawn,  
Go for yourself, if you have never gone;

Go in mid-winter, when the drifting sleet,  
Through the bare hall pursues your freezing feet,  
And, as from room to room you hurry past, 30  
The crazy building rattling in the blast,  
At doors ajar, gaunt faces peep and glare,  
In hopes some friendly step may linger there.  
Go in mid-summer—when the August rays  
Pour on the place their fierce, untempered blaze; 35  
From the scorched pavement to the sun-struck  
eaves,  
No point of shade the flaming mass relieves,  
And the hot air, with rank and poisonous breath,  
Through doors and windows puffs disease and  
death.  
Or go as Firkin went—on some bright day, 40  
When all without glows in the cheerful ray;  
And as your footsteps cross the mouldering sill,  
Feel the cold dampness and the sudden chill  
Strike through your shivering sense with omens  
ill:  
*He* felt it not, through all the livelong year, 45  
He walked, encircled in an atmosphere,

Filtered and rarified to that degree,  
By his Two Million power of solvency,  
That such impressions had no power of stealing  
Into his perfect vacuum of feeling ; 50  
No squalid sights disturbed his calm repose,  
Nor pity reached him even through his nose !  
He gained the house, entered with stately air,  
Sought the delinquent Agent everywhere,  
In vain—then mounted, while each conscious stair 55  
Creaked with the burden of the Millionaire,  
From loft to loft, up to the topmost floor ;  
Here paused for breath, when, suddenly, a door,  
Blown by a vagrant gust, wide open flew,  
And in that garret chamber, as he turned, 60  
On the bare boards, before his startled view,  
She stood disclosed—the hated and the spurned !  
  
There, face to face, they stood ; a breathless second,  
Looked at each other ; then she sternly beckoned ;  
There was a lightning flash within her eye, 65  
There was a speaking grandeur in her form,  
That cowed and awed him, though he knew not  
why,



As the dumb beast quails from the coming storm  
It dreads to meet, but sees not how to fly.  
He crossed the sill; she pointed to the bed; 70  
There lay her boy, his innocent, curly head,  
Nestled upon the pillow, and his face  
Lit with the solemn and unearthly grace  
That crowns but once the children of our race;  
God gives it when He takes them—he was dead! 75  
A broken toy, a bunch of withered flowers,  
In his thin hands were clasped, his breast above,  
The last frail ties that to this world of ours  
Had linked the sufferer—save a mother's love.  
How marble-white and fair—too fair to bury! 80  
But Firkin had no taste for statuary,  
Even of that rare style, perfect and pure,  
Where Death and Beauty set their signature.  
He saw and looked away, his dull, dark brow  
Touched with no gleam of sympathy; but now 85  
The latent lightning loosed, and flashed, and woke  
The pent up tempest of her soul; it broke  
With all that woman's frantic grief could pour,

Upon his guilty head, as she charged home  
Her husband's death, her sweet child's martyr-  
dom, 90  
To his account, and bade him pay the score.  
She paused a moment, as upon the dun,  
Dark, city roofs that stretched below, the sun  
Threw out its setting gleam, and lit the tips  
Of tapering masts, where the great merchant ships 95  
Lay at their wharves, and tinged the towering  
spires,  
With the last flicker of its waning fires,  
As all along the wintry sky they streamed.  
She turned and saw ; like one inspired she seemed,  
With a prophetic fury, as of old, 100  
Some fabled Pythoness whose oracles rolled  
Along the Delphic shadows and foretold  
The doom of empires. "Look! oh look!" she  
cried,  
"The sun is setting on your pomp and pride ;  
See the great city, stretching through the light, 105  
Its million pulses beating towards the night ;

Think not for such as you it toils and groans,  
In ceaseless struggles, for the very stones  
Would cry aloud, were all its wealth like yours ;  
Know that the righteous Heaven scarce endures *110*  
Your hateful presence ; nor can I ; begone,  
And with you take my loathing and my scorn.  
The hour is near when you shall colder lie,  
Than this poor babe who here has crept to die ;  
Then know that close behind your gorgeous hearse, *115*  
Shall follow in its train the Widow's curse,  
And heavier than the marble, on you press,  
The malediction of the Fatherless !”

Firkin was reckoned, as all Wall street knows,  
A handsome speaker ; self-made Ciceros, *120*  
With lungs for logic and for brains, effront'ry,  
Are not uncommon in our growing country.  
And when the Gold Swamp stockholders, of late,  
Presented him with that grand piece of plate,  
Upon declaring the extra Dividend, *125*  
In which they cleverly contrived to spend

Out of their Capital, the last cent of cash,  
Just twenty days before the final smash,  
He made a speech which all the Daily Press,  
Flushed with champagne, pronounced a great suc-  
cess. 130

But now he's dumb; no public diner out,  
Entirely unaccustomed and unprepared  
For the occasion, ever looked about  
In blanker silence; there he stood and stared,  
Stupid and stunned, and when, with queenly air, 135  
She waved him from her, like a worthless thing,  
Shrank from the withering glance he could not bear  
Turned on his heel and went, the poisoned sting  
Rankling and festering in the inmost core,  
Of that self-love no shaft e'er pierced before. 140

He boiled with rage; he felt he had been tricked  
Into the garret, and his person picked  
Of all its dignity; his seething brain  
With fury reeled and throbbled with sudden pain,  
And a vague terror he could not restrain. 145  
Still, as he hurried on his homeward track,  
Upon his thought the garret scene came back,—

The desolate room, the corpse, the withered flower,  
Her curse, the blight of all that sunset hour ;  
And in their wild disorder and confusion, 150  
One thought still struggled upward—Retribution !  
Haunted and dogged him, through the shadows  
dim,  
Outran his heavy step, awaited him,  
As through his spacious halls he passed and sought  
His private chamber, where, with cunning wrought, 155  
Cased in the solid wall, with massive locks  
And bolts and bars, he kept his great, strong box.  
There in the winter evenings he resorted,  
His deeds and bonds and mortgages assorted,  
Indulged in long financial lucubrations, 160  
And laid his plans for future speculations.  
Thither he hastened now, to cool the flame,  
Kindled within by hate and scorn and shame ;  
Hour after hour, he sat and vainly tried,  
In all his great estate, to bury and hide, 165  
From his own sense, his galled and blasted pride.  
He felt himself a beggar ; had he dreamed,  
Or was he really what, in thought, he seemed,

Bankrupt and penniless? From a secret till,  
He drew and opened, with trembling hand, his  
WILL, 170  
That weighty document, on which depended  
So much when once his lease of life was ended;  
Perchance 'twould reassure him there to see  
The whole Two Millions in epitome;  
He grasps it firmly, 'tis no mockery! 175  
But, as he grasps, why do his eyes grow dim,  
And all the page before his senses swim?  
There is no strange handwriting on the wall,  
Through all the midnight hush no threatening call,  
Nor on the marble floors the stealthy fall 180  
Of fatal footstep. All is safe. Thou Fool,  
*The avenging Deities are shod with wool!*  
Nor in the air around, nor overhead,  
We hear the sound or echo of their tread,  
Nor catch the rustling of the rapid dart 185  
That wings its errand to the victim's heart!

#### IV.

AND there they found him ; when the morning  
    broke,  
And from their attic dreams the housemaids woke,  
The earliest servant, while from floor to floor  
She went, was startled as she passed the door.  
The room was silent, but the light still burned,      5  
And, wondering at the unwonted waste, she turned,  
Looked in with curious eye, then at the sight,  
Or what she thought she saw, started with fright ;  
Started, but checked a scream ; looks in once  
    more,  
Laughs, half in earnest, at her silly fears,      10

Then ventures in, with rapid step, uncertain,  
And, breathless with fresh terror, draws the curtain,  
Crimson and heavy ; and the daylight peers  
Through the great window, not a friendly visitor,  
But with the cold, gray glance of an Inquisitor, 15  
Searching and prying with malignant spite,  
To drag some hidden horror to the light.  
A moment, while her heart beats fast and faster,  
The servant stands and looks upon her master ;  
One glance from head to foot, from foot to head, 20  
Then through the house shouts, frantic—“ *he is  
dead!*”

Soon, roused from sleep, the startled Family,  
(Those Firkin Cousins, to the tenth degree)  
From every room, rush to the fearful place,  
Where, cold and rigid, with distorted face, 25  
And stiffened limbs and fixed and ghastly glare,  
He sits, a spectacle—but I forbear  
The gross description, though the situation  
Tempts to the tragic, with sollicitation



To launch our song upon the tide that sets 30  
Towards Melodramas and Police Gazettes,  
Blood-red with horrors; let me rather screen  
The dismal picture, and dismiss the scene.  
Yet, ere it passes wholly from the thought,  
By one strange sight the startled sense is caught; 35  
Those outstretched hands, what is that they grasp  
With clutch convulsive, in their iron clasp?  
Half in each hand, a torn and crumpled roll—  
What Sibyl's mystic leaves, or fated scroll,  
What pass, unchallenged, to the eternal ages, 40  
That he should hold so fast those written pages?  
They wonder, too, the crowd who stand and stare,  
Grouped in the chamber, round the fatal chair,  
Shocked and bewildered, striving to condense  
Their vague, impalpable terror, to a sense 45  
Of present evil. They, too, look and wonder  
At the clinched hands and pages torn asunder;  
Then swift suspicion follows on surprise,  
They seize the fingers motionless and still,  
Glance at the severed sheets with searching eyes, 50  
And point and whisper, "*'tis the dead man's WILL!*"

Firkin's Last Will! But who may know the fact,  
Whether destroyed by his deliberate act,  
Or rent and shattered in his struggling clutch,  
When, with convulsive throes, the sudden stroke 55  
Shot through his frame, swift as the lightning touch  
Shivers, with fatal flash, the heart of oak.  
This is the question which they much revolve,  
And long to guess and vainly seek to solve.  
As through the halls and up the staircase grand, 60  
The lifeless, heavy weight is slowly borne,  
Still, as he goes, he grasps in either hand  
The rustling leaves, illegible and torn;  
And when they lay him, like a child asleep,  
Gently upon his bed, his fingers keep 65  
Their desperate hold, and still returns the query,  
With which their wits the anxious household  
weary,  
How came it thus? by chance or act of sense,  
And what, in either case, the consequence?  
If torn unconsciously, is not the paper 70  
His Will no less? A little wax, a taper,

If from his hands it can be loosed with care,  
 Are all it needs the damage to repair.  
 But is that wisest? it is undecided  
 As yet, entirely, what the Will provided, 75  
 To whom it shows his final generosity,  
 To whom his love, and whom his animosity;  
 Perhaps 'tis better to assume he meant  
 To leave behind him no last Testament,  
 And so destroyed it—but then who are heirs, 80  
 And what will be their rights, and what their shares?  
 One thing is certain, this they all agree—  
 “In this strange crisis, it is best to see  
 If 'tis a case of real Intestacy,  
 Without delay or further speculations. 85  
 How can we mourn and weep for him at ease,  
 Until we know, his sorrowful relations,  
 If we are Heirs at Law or Devisees?  
 This must be fixed beyond all contradiction,  
 And that at once—business before affliction! 90  
 We can postpone the heavier claims of sorrow,  
 The mourning won't be ready till to-morrow;  
 Besides, it is but just to the departed,

That the enquiry should at once be started,  
 He was so prompt, in life ; at any rate, 95  
 It will not do that we degenerate ;  
 Whatever happens to his fortune ample,  
 He has, at least, bequeathed us his example ! ”  
 So out of reverence, a new variety,  
 And touching instance of Collateral piety, 100  
 Before his form was dressed for its last journey,  
 The afflicted family sent for their Attorney !

Firkin had hated Lawyers all his life ;  
 Not that he feared the risks of legal strife,  
 'Twas rather suited to his inclination 105  
 To keep a moderate stock of litigation.  
 But Lawyers were a class he never trusted,  
 Especially when their fees must be adjusted ;  
 Like all this world's best things, he could not use  
 them  
 Without a strong temptation to abuse them, 110  
 And that more heartily, because, no doubt,  
 They were the men who soonest found him out.

He was peculiarly hard and unforgiving  
 On those so lucky as to make a living.  
 Firkin, whose life was one long, shrewd device 115  
 To get the most by parting with the least,  
 The largest value for the smallest price,  
 (A notion not exclusively "down East,")  
 Disliked, on principle, these legal gentry,  
 Who dealt in something besides double entry ; 120  
 And lost in quibbles, points and learned jargon,  
 Couldn't, to save their lives, drive a sharp bargain !  
 Why should they thrive, (in his wise way he said it,)  
 They had no capital and little credit ;  
 And if 'twas talents helped them to their gains, 125  
 Why then there ought to be a tax on brains !  
 Besides, a weightier argument he founds—  
 The virtuous censor—on high moral grounds,  
 "He knew the law to be a knavish science,  
 Made to demoralize ingenuous clients ; 130  
 Who ever saw a single instance yet,  
 Of any debtor sneaking out of debt,  
 By pleading usury or limitation,  
 Save by a lawyer's pen and penetration ?

Who ever skulked behind the law's delay, 135  
 Unless some shrewd attorney showed the way,  
 By his superior skill got the ascendant,  
 And led astray the innocent defendant ?"  
 'Twas touching, quite, his horror when he saw,  
 How Lawyers set aside the Moral Law. 140  
 Thus, under cover of the Decalogue,  
 He aimed and fired, through thickest mental fog,  
 His red-hot shot at that suspicious craft,  
 The New York Bar, and raked them fore and aft.  
 Protesting ever, as his firm conviction, 145  
 An honest Lawyer was a Legal Fiction !

Yet he employed one ; in his dangerous hands,  
 Trusted the title deeds of all his lands ;  
 Breathed in his ear his choicest confidence ;  
 Drew from his subtle mind its keenest sense ; 150  
 Taxed him with problems, new and strange, and  
     kept  
 His tired brain working, while his client slept.  
 He loved to see the Athletes of the Bar,  
 Foot-sore and dusty, chase the gilded car

Of wealth, and feel, keen as the driver's lash, 155  
 In all their strength, their conscious need of cash.  
 He liked to have their learning and their skill  
 Drudge in his cause, like Samson at the mill,  
 Then, in the reckoning, grudged a greater latitude  
 For their requital than his scanty gratitude! 160

Well, let it pass; his prejudice, perchance,  
 Was partly envy, partly ignorance;  
 And most the latter, for the loudest bark,  
 As we all know, is always in the dark!

The Man of Law obeys the early warning, 165  
 Which summoned him to seek the house of mourning;  
 His measured footsteps crossed the marble hall,  
 And, scarce perceived, he entered where they all  
 Waited his coming; not in mute suspense,  
 But with loud strife, impatient and intense. 170  
 They had contrived, I know not in what way,  
 To extricate the Will, and there it lay—  
 Its separate fragments strewn upon the table,  
 And all its items, as they best were able,

They had deciphered—some with eager pleasure, 175  
Some with vexation which no words can measure ;

For those were well endowed, who nothing merited,  
These scarcely mentioned, or quite disinherited !

I cannot pause to give the long deduction,  
But to the family peace it was destruction ! 180

At once two parties, in that house of Death,  
Sprang into life, full armed, with poisoned breath,  
“ *Will* ” and “ *No Will*,” their test and shibboleth.

And, when the Lawyer came, both sets of heirs  
Pounced fiercely on him, claiming he was theirs. 185

He calmed the uproar, heard the story through,  
And strove in vain to catch its hidden clue.

To tear his Will had Firkin really meant,  
Or was it only a strange accident ?

Perchance a question purely of intent, 190  
Perchance of doubtful law ; in either view,

The case was novel and the point was new ;  
And, it was plain at the first observation  
Good for a Trojan War of litigation.



Straight on the lawyer's clear, prophetic sight, 195  
 THE FIRKIN WILL CASE rises into light,  
 Latest and greatest of the famous causes,  
 About last wills, their codicils and clauses.  
 He sees the eager birds of prey who wait,  
 Around the carcass of the huge estate, 200  
 In the dim chambers of the Surrogate ;  
 Three bulky quartos stuffed with the proceedings,  
 Ten leading Lawyers crammed with special plead-  
     ings;  
 A hundred witnesses on either side,  
 With cross examinations scarified ; 205  
 And twenty Doctors, portly and persistent,  
 With twenty theories, all inconsistent !  
 But, fairest sight of all, besides, he sees  
 A princely revenue of costs and fees,  
 No risk of loss, no client to be dunned, 210  
 All the expenses charged upon the Fund !  
 Here was Temptation. Here, too, Opportunity  
 To plead for peace, domestic love, and unity.  
 A Lawyer's duty, as its line he saw,  
 Was first to keep his clients out of law ! 215

He seized the occasion ; while his sallow face  
Flushed with the unwonted theme, he snatched a  
    grace,  
Beyond the utmost reach of Coke or Chitty,  
And half in honest scorn, and half in pity,  
While all his hearers marvelled as he spoke,                   220  
Thus from his lips his stern remonstrance broke :

    “ My Friends, this should be settled ! Mend  
    the Will,  
Mend it and prove it and thereby fulfil  
The better law of love, and kindly waive  
All thought of strife above the new made grave.                   225  
Close the estate as in the Will provided,  
But with the agreement, that it be divided,  
By those who take, in just and generous shares,  
Among all parties claiming to be heirs.  
Take my advice, the best in all such cases,                   230  
And come to terms upon this liberal basis.  
Who fights to the end may win, but doubly wise  
Who knows the moment when to compromise,

And, for a bird in hand, forbears to push  
A doubtful search for two inside the bush. 235  
So thought the Allies, when they changed the venue  
From Crimean trenches, batteries and tents,  
To that Round Table, where the very men you  
Had lately known as fierce belligerents,  
Sat down to still the tempest that they woke, 240  
The fettered hands of Commerce to release,  
To sign preliminaries, and to smoke,  
If not the pipe, the mild cigar of Peace !  
Do as they did ; relinquish every laurel  
That might be won in this grand family quarrel, 245  
And like fair, Christian men, settle betimes ;  
Blunders in such contingencies are crimes.  
If not the plan I hint, propose another,  
Necessity is still Invention's mother ;  
And surely in this case, without delay, 250  
A method may be found, if, as they say,  
Wherever there's a WILL there is a way !

“ But if you find, between conflicting views,

And jarring claims, too great disparity,  
Give the whole fortune (which they won't refuse) 255  
To some deserving city Charity ;  
Or, if this fails, then, as a last resort,  
Stay all proceedings, cut the matter short,  
Fly from the law and juries and reporters,  
Change the Two Millions into solid metal, 260  
And sink the bullion in the deepest waters  
This side the Narrows—rather than not settle !  
Far better thus than make your names a handle  
For public ridicule and private scandal ;  
Far better thus than drag through all the Courts, 265  
To point Opinions and to swell Reports ;  
To make the rich man shudder as he sees  
How swift a curse, what dire calamities,  
May wait upon the wealthiest, for whom—  
Equal with beggars in the final doom— 270  
Death is appointed, with its unknown ills,  
And after death—the probate of their Wills ;  
The ruinous vices, or the endless hate,  
Too oft distributed with their estate,

Or the hot haste which, in one generation, 275  
 Squanders a lifetime's slow accumulation.  
 To make the poor man, in his worst despair,  
 Thank God, at least, he's not a Millionnaire !  
 To lie—scarce coffined in his marble vault,  
 Scarce hushed the echo of the funeral prayers, 280  
 Ere, overhead, begins the fierce assault,  
 And deadly struggle of contending heirs ;  
 Ruthless of memory or of honest fame ;  
 Reckless of virtues, earlier or later ;  
 And sinking even the once honored name, 285  
 In that post-mortem title—the TESTATOR !”

He ceased ; none answered, save one meta-  
 physical

Young lady, whom the family thought satirical,  
 Remarked, aside, with glances somewhat quizzical,  
 That, really, the affair was quite a miracle— 290  
 SATAN reproving SIN—the peroration  
 Of the distinguished Counsellor's oration,  
 Where he alluded to Virtue with such force,  
 Would have been more appropriate, of course,

Were it not known that of that useful article  
The late lamented never had a particle!

295

And did they settle as their Counsel bid?  
My precious Reader, do you think they did?  
He left the house; his fruitless task was done;  
And soon the clients following, one by one  
(Each, eager in the race to be the winner),  
Retained a dozen Lawyers before dinner!

300

Meanwhile, a hundred rumors took the air;  
“Firkin was dead, the famous Millionaire,  
Found dead at daylight, sitting in his chair,  
His breath quite gone, the vital spark extinct.”  
This was the first report, startling and strange,  
Posted on bulletins and heard on 'Change;  
Sadder the story scarce could be, or shorter.  
Indeed, our valued friend, the News Reporter,  
Found it, at once, entirely too succinct  
To serve his purpose. An event so solemn  
Should furnish solid matter for a column,

305

310

And to despatch it in a paragraph  
 Were to disgrace the Associated Press, 315  
 And bring discredit on that gallant staff  
 Of short-hand Templars, at whose challenge dreaded  
 Each faintest whisper, each remotest guess,  
 A CITY ITEM stands, in line and leaded,  
 To pierce from Wall street to the Wilderness. 320  
 'Twas not enough the matter was so serious,  
 ITEMS determined it should be mysterious ;  
 A flood of rumors must be got about,  
 The public head must have a rush of doubt,  
 The public sense be stunned with contradiction, 325  
 Then kept alive with stimulants and friction.  
 So at the first announcement Items hinted  
 That strange developments would soon be printed,  
 Then in loud whispers, like a stage "Aside,"  
 Gave out vague inklings about "Suicide"— 330  
 "Death by his own rash act"—the hidden clue,  
 Domestic troubles none but Items knew,  
 Financial storms, not dreamed of in the street,  
 Till Items should divulge the balance-sheet.

This fires the train—the incendiaries throw 335  
Upon the town, completely to perplex it,  
The choice of weapons for the fatal blow  
By which poor Firkin made his final exit ;  
A master stroke, for the whole point is now,  
Not *did* he kill himself, but only *how* ? 340  
But O, sagacious Items, well you know  
How wise to have two strings to one long bow,  
Discreetly, therefore, at the self same time,  
You give oracular hints of darker crime—  
“ Firkin a suicide ! nothing absurder, 345  
Murder will out, and what is this but murder ? ”  
Perchance a luckier venture than the first,  
The public likes so well to know the worst,  
And with the latest horror slake the thirst,  
The old, original, human thirst for blood, 350  
Whose savage scent, keen as in kite or vulture,  
Still filters down from our primeval mud,  
Through the pure Parian of our modern Culture.  
But, about noon, both theories exploded—  
A fatal issue, Items had foreboded, 355



But still the veteran energies contrive  
 To fan the spark and keep the fire alive ;  
 Suppose he died a natural death, what then ?  
 Of course he must, like all distinguished men,  
 Have uttered some last words, and what were they ? 360  
 FIRKIN'S LAST WORDS ! Items alone can say.  
 One version ran that, turning to the wall,  
 He said something profound about the *Fall*,  
 But the narrator somehow had forgotten,  
 Whether he meant the Fall of Man, or Cotton. 365  
 Another, that, before his eyes were fixed, he  
 Said he should go at taker's option—sixty !  
 Another still, to show his mental vigor,  
 Put on his lips this sentiment sublime,  
 That he had lived up to his final figure, 370  
 Just one per cent. of all recorded Time !  
 But, of a sudden, this new blaze went out,  
 And left involved in blackest, midnight doubt  
 Firkin's last words, like (though I hate comparisons)  
 Great William Pitt's or good old General Harrison's ! 375  
 For now the story of the Will, at last,  
 Is in the wind, and flying free and fast ;

Items must haste the rumor to sequestrate,  
And tell the World that Firkin died intestate!

And the World listens, with its greedy ears, 380  
And in the midst of all its cares and fears,  
Its toils and troubles, stands a moment still  
To ask if, really, Firkin left no Will?  
And then to question, doubt and speculate,  
What will become of his immense estate? 385  
Or may not yet the damaged Will suffice,  
Why should the Statute be so over nice?  
Oh fond and foolish World! why waste a thought  
On these vain matters which concern you not;  
Let the Two Millions tremble in the scales, 390  
What odds to you whichever side prevails?  
Oh captious Cynic, thus the World replies,  
Our empty pockets do not blind our eyes;  
A solid fortune, though not half a dime  
Come to our fingers, is a sight sublime; 395  
That which is rarest still the most will please;  
Why to the distant Alps and Pyrenees,

And Apennine and Tyrol do you roam,  
 When there are lakes and mountains here at  
                   home ?

While you indulge your errant fancies yonder,       400  
 Leave us our home-made visions of Golconda,  
 Let us enjoy in all its golden glare  
 The distant prospect of the Millionaire !

But most of all this sudden stroke of fate,  
 Provoked the Legal world to high debate ;       405  
 The grateful Bar, with tears in all its eyes,  
 Sees that in Firkin's death it draws a prize ;  
 That he, like many of our rich Patricians,  
 Who all their lives have grudged a counsel fee,  
 Quarrelled with Costs and Term fees and commis-  
                   sions,   410  
 The Law and Lawyers—after death would be,  
 In spite of every adverse prepossession,  
 A liberal patron of the learned profession.  
 In clearest light the admiring Bar foresaw,  
 Firkin would live immortal in the Law,               415





And even with the strict ecclesiastic,  
 Watching benignly o'er his city fold,  
 So often swerves his sense, with influence plastic,  
 Against their vices to offset their gold ;  
 For human nature to itself is true, 460  
 And still the same in pulpit and in pew.  
 Nay, never start and frown, with aspect sinister,  
 My worthy Madam, I don't mean *your* Minister !  
 But only Firkin's ! O, my clerical friend,  
 Your knee should surely be the last to bend 465  
 In Mammon worship ; for the Priest and Preacher  
 Should, like his Master, aim to be the Teacher  
 And friend of every man who walks the Earth,  
 Without inquiring—"How much is he worth ?"  
 But tell me, you, whose polished periods poured, 470  
 In vain, on Firkin, while he slept and snored,  
 Snug in the tufted velvet ; you who have  
 The Wealthy with you always, can you brave  
 The social tyrannies, whose iron heel,  
 Tramples on Christian love and faith and zeal, 475  
 And makes God's poor almost an exiled race,  
 Even from the open Temples of His grace ?

Say, in your sympathies, who largest shares,  
 Or in your secret sighs, or public prayers,  
 This well-endowed, well-clad, well-fed parishioner, 480  
 Close by the chancel, or that poor petitioner,  
 Who hides and worships in the distant gallery,  
 And never paid a penny towards your salary?  
 Say which you welcome with the warmest smiles,  
 These brilliant butterflies, whose dazzling files, 485  
 In rustling silks, sweep through the sacred aisles ;  
 Or that sad sister, half ashamed to go,  
 And praise her Maker, dressed in calico !  
 Say, for these queries you can best determine,  
 What is the aim in that grand charity sermon, 490  
 Full of fine Points, which you shall preach to-  
           night,  
 Dives' subscription, payable at sight,  
 Or yonder widow's prayer and widow's mite?  
 There is who marks them both ; there is who weighs,  
 In His just hands, the offering and its praise, 495  
 With whom the test of that unerring trial,  
 Is not the Dollar, but the Self-Denial !

But this is episode—its innocent source,  
 Firkin's unwritten Funeral Discourse,  
 For which our Clerical friend is sore perplexed, *500*  
 Where to discover an appropriate Text !  
 In vain, on eulogistic thoughts intent,  
 He turned the pages of his Testament.  
 Skipped the Beatitudes. The place passed by,  
 About the camel and the needle's eye ; *505*  
 Wisely discarded too, as extra hazardous,  
 The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus !  
 Gave up the Gospels ; hurried past the facts  
 Narrated of the early Church, in Acts,  
 Especially those which state the primitive way *510*  
 They held all things in common at that day,  
 (A dangerous theory, to our times unsuited,  
 And which the Rector had himself refuted,)  
 Then through the Epistles, but no word was there  
 From which to canonize a Millionaire, *515*  
 But solemn warnings, ranking wealth and stations,  
 Not with God's blessings, but the World's tempta-  
 tions,



And flaming words, which, like the sword that  
turned,

Each way before the gates of Eden, burned  
With the swift flash of vengeance, and foretold *520*  
Garments moth-eaten, and the cankered gold,  
And treasures heaped together for the days,  
Which should be lurid with their final blaze!

At last he gave it up; then thought that since,  
'Twas not the Christian, but the Merchant Prince, *525*  
He was to praise and bury—it was best  
To bring his virtues to the easier test  
Of worldly wisdom; plant its fairest laurel  
On Firkin's brow, and point its finest moral.  
The task was easy now; the Rector took *530*  
Once more, with lightened heart, the sacred Book,  
Turned back the leaves, and chose, with tact sur-  
prising,  
A text from Proverbs, about early rising!

Thus, through the fevered hours, that busy day,  
So full of Firkin, slowly wore away, 535  
Until the Night came down, with friendly pity,  
To breathe its blessing o'er the troubled City.  
And while the Twilight deepens, far and near,  
One word, my Reader, in your private ear—  
The Will was left untouched. On its first head, 540  
The Funeral Discourse was knocked and killed ;  
The Last Words, taken back, were all unsaid ;  
The sapient Bar's predictions unfulfilled ;  
The dozen Lawyers left without their fees ;  
And all the Castles in the air which reared 545  
Their golden towers before the devisees,  
Were mined and stormed, blew up and disap-  
peared—  
One little fact this fearful ruin spread,  
To tell the plain truth, Firkin WASN'T DEAD !

## V.

Once more, a single moment, and the scene  
Shifts to the garret ; but no Tragedy Queen  
Discloses now, her proud, swift vengeance heaping  
Upon her victim—only a woman—weeping !  
The child was buried ; its rude grave, unstrewn 5  
With wreath or flower, unmarked by slab or stone,  
Was closed, and she was in the world alone.  
In the calm twilight, while the shadows crept  
Gently around, as if to soothe her grief,  
Over her drear, parched heart, suddenly swept 10  
A shower of tears, kind Nature's best relief.

She wept—and for a moment seemed to know,  
In spite of Want, the luxury of Woe!  
She wept—like water from the riven rock,  
In the dry desert, gushed those unchecked tears; 15  
A moment only, for a loud, long knock,  
And heavy footstep, at the door she hears,  
And the same instant, ere the sound is spent,  
The Agent enters. Has he come for rent?

He was good-humored, though a Rent Collector 20  
Of shiftless tenants oft the kind protector,  
His human nature he did not forget,  
And in his heart there was some room to let!  
He liked the lodger on the topmost floor,  
And knew her for a lady, long before 25  
He learned the truth, by listening near the door,  
When Firkin was within (for he was there,  
Though all unheeded by our Millionaire);  
And now he came, in haste and out of breath,  
To tell the story of the sudden death, 30  
And the torn Will, by which, he thought, perchance  
She too might share the great inheritance;

For he imagined that, in fact, she stood  
Linked to the Landlord by some tie of blood.  
But this she heeded not, nor even heard ; 35  
Her sense was stunned by that first fearful word.  
Could it be so ? And was he really dead,  
Her curse still resting on his aged head !  
O, fatal passion ! As she hoped for Heaven,  
His cruel wrongs to her were all forgiven, 40  
For though, in her wild grief, on him she cast  
The heavy forfeit of her ruined Past,  
And of her blighted, hopeless Future, yet  
Her better Nature cancelled all the debt !

Quickly she rose, and from the place she passed ; 45  
One backward glance she gave—it was the last—  
At the dark Tenement house, forlorn and cheer-  
less ;  
One eager glance, before ; then, swift and fearless,  
Through deepening night, beneath the stars' pure  
ray,  
With rapid footstep, hurries on her way. 50

Blessings go with her ! Never, by pity led,  
A truer heart on holier errand sped ;  
She little knows what sacred honors wait  
To crown her brow, beyond the unfolding gate  
Through which she passes, from her low estate      55  
To her high mission ; but good Angels ask  
To cheer and guide her in her noble task !

And now she stands within the spacious room,  
Where, on his lonely couch, he lies in state ;  
A single light streams through the silent gloom,      60  
And burns above him, like the torch of Fate.  
The house is silent, for the troop of heirs  
Are absent, busied with their new affairs  
Which Wealth, though distant, shadows with its  
    cares.  
The frightened servants, left alone with Death,      65  
Move softly round and speak with whispered  
    breath ;  
The dread of Apoplexy and the Devil,  
Has even made the pompous footman civil ;

Rachel had entered freely, and the kind  
But drowsy housemaids, willingly resigned, 70  
At her entreaty, the sad charge, to keep  
Watch by the bedside of that last, long sleep.  
They left her there with him, once more alone ;  
But oh, how changed, since those few hours had  
    flown ;  
Then all was scorn and hate ; now, pure and warm, 75  
Love keeps its vigil by that stricken form.  
She clasps his heavy hand, she bends and kneels ;  
How deep the shade that o'er her senses steals,  
For Death, still following in one beaten track,  
With each new sorrow brings the old griefs back ; 80  
And as she meekly bows her weary head,  
She weeps for all her Lost and all her Dead !

Look, Rachel! Look! Start from your bend-  
    ed knees!

Your touch has thrilled him ; look—he stirs, he  
    sees!

Breathless, she watches. Yes! he sees, he stirs, 85  
His opening eyes are fastened upon hers!

Then close convulsive, as when one who shakes  
A frightful dream away, and wildly wakes,  
Sees its worst terror waiting by his side !  
*Her* form ; *her* face ; the strange sepulchral gloom— 90  
Is this the hour of vengeance—she the Guide  
To light his footsteps to the final Doom !  
Breathless, she watches. Once again, his glance  
Struggles with upward gleam from that strange  
trance ;

But now its dim foreboding meets the grace 100  
That pours upon him from her loving face,  
To calm his fear ; once more his eyelids raise ;  
He clings to her with speechless, lingering gaze ;  
One long, imploring look, as if to say—  
“ What horrid Night is this ? Oh, lead me back  
to Day ! ” 105

She led him back ; from that dark, dismal night,  
A Wreck and Ruin. For the fearful stroke  
Had shattered all his frame and left its blight  
On all his senses. Nevermore they woke



